

A. H. Curtis

Bedford Co., Pa.

Aug. 11, 1867.

Professor Gray:

Dear Sir - Since I wrote you last I have had the great pleasure of making a trip to the celebrated Peaks of Otter, and having turned the visit to Botanical advantage, I have thought that a brief account of it might be of interest to you. The day we selected proved to be a clear but hot one, and, unfortunately, we were delayed in starting till a late hour, so that we did not reach the foot of the mountains, which are eight or nine miles distant from us, till nearly noon. As soon as the carriage began to ascend, I alighted with my pup and went to work, collecting specimens when I found anything desirable, and then hurrying on to overtake the carriage, our limited time preventing any delay of that vehicle, so that I had to make a more hurried ascent than I could have desired, though not a particularly fatiguing one, for I have indeed to do about as much climbing every time I make a trip here, the country generally being hilly & rocky, especially in good botanical districts. Along the road-side at the base of the mountain and for about half a mile up, I observed an unusual variety of the plants which "escape from cultivation": *Gammaleis*, *Laponaria*, *Abutilon*, *Leonurus cardiaca*, *Euphorbia Lathyrus*, and, especially the *Ruta*

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gravelines, which grew in great abundance among the rocks along the road-sides. After the first half mile nearly all ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~road~~ ^{road} ~~was~~ ^{was} ~~covered~~ ^{covered} ~~by~~ ^{by} ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~forest~~ ^{forest} ~~above~~ ^{above}, and almost entirely covered with rocks and stones, the road in many places running almost impassable. After traversing this stony desert for a mile or so, we emerged into the notch between the mountains, where the road is smooth, with houses and cultivated fields on either side. There is a swamp running through this notch, but I could not stop to examine its vegetation; that of the road-sides was not peculiar. But we have now reached the point where we must begin to climb again. On the one hand we are invited to the huge form of the Round Top; on the other to the equally high, but conical & volcanic-looking South Peak. To the latter, like most tourists, we turn our course, & commence the ascent, zigzagging our way up its steep sides, still, when about half a mile from the summit, we come to the end of the carriage road. Thence we climb with difficulty up steep, stony paths and over rocks piled on rocks till we approach the summit, where, after groping our way amongst overhanging rocks & dense shrubbery, we stand at last upon the highest soil in this mountain state, and at the base of the famous Crown of Otter, a mass of huge rocks piled one upon another to the height of sixty feet. By carving upon these enduring tablets some hundreds of humble aspirants for immortality have been enabled to ~~hand~~ perpetuate

their names or initials through all coming time. Now clambering up these rocks as best we can, for the way throughout is innocent of artificial aids, we mount above the topmost rock, when a scene bursts on the view which would well repay a much longer journey. Eastward the hills and valleys blend into what seems to be a great, sunlit plain, stretching away as far as the eye can reach; directly north towers the Round Top; and to the West the mountains of Western Va. present a vast, billowing expanse, like a storm-swept sea. Looking downward, the rocks we stand on seem suspended in mid-air, so isolated from earth do they appear. But the hour is late, and we hasten to descend. On the way we stop to refresh ourselves at a very large spring of beautiful water which gushes out of the mountain-side, & goes tumbling down along the road-side, relieving the gloom of the sombre, rocky forest, and accompanying us a mile beyond the base. At intervals we catch glimpses of the beautiful landscape below, from ~~intervals~~ openings whence, three years ago, the people of Bedford Co. first caught the glitter of the bayonets of the advancing Union army, carrying fear to the hearts of the masters & joy to the enslaved.

The vegetation as we left the gap became very rich, and toward the summit it was wonderfully luxuriant, the dense masses of Rhododendron, Azalea, Acer Penns., Spiraea salicifolia, S. Arumens, &c., nearly choking the way. It seems very strange that the S. salicifolia should grow at the summit of a mountain, but I am sure it

is that. I also found *Thu. S. corymbosa* there, & down in
my vicinity I find *Thu. S. tormentosa*, and both the *S. stemo-*
cus & *S. opulifolia* common. The rocks near the summit
were very beautiful being clothed with *Ferns*, great *Lichens*,
masses of the beautiful *Hendersona villosa*, *Campanula divar-*
icata, *Saxifraga lineariumifolia*, &c. Of the latter I will
send you a specimen, as I can of any other you may desire.
I found the *Sedum telephioides*, and two other species,
which I think you do not describe. One of them grew
on the ground, and the leaves at the ends of the branches
were in dense rosettes; the other on rocks, & most resembled
S. tetraetum. Neither were in flower, but I will send leaf
specimens. On the very summit of the Mt. ~~rose~~ ^{eximia} the *Di-centra* ^{eximia} ~~gigorea~~
in great abundance - a beautiful plant. Along the side of
the peak there is an abundance of the *Melanthium Virg.*,
Rubus odoratus, ^{*Campanula actaea*}, &c. I also found the *Corvallisaria*, *Amian-*
thium, *Vaccinium parv.*, &c. The trees were almost entirely
deciduous. I saw only a few shrubby *Hemlock*s. As soon
as I hear from you again I shall make up a pkg. of things
that I would like you to determine, & send them to you
by mail. I will label the things that I am doubtful
about, and if you find any incorrect, you might
return me the labels of such, with the proper names
written thereon. I ~~trust~~ I wish to make you as little
trouble as I can, but hope you will reply as promptly as
possible. I am collecting a large quantity of duplicates, in view of
making exchanges next winter, & regret that I cannot obtain a copy of the
Naturalists Directory, which would greatly aid me. I wrote last Spring
to Dr. Patnam, but enc. no reply. Could you not obtain a copy for me?
I remain -- Very truly yours,

A. H. S. 187